

# • Meet the Author •

## Jennifer Berne

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).

Grades  
K-2, 3-5



Photo from [www.jenniferberne.com](http://www.jenniferberne.com)

**Jennifer Berne** is the award-winning author of *Manfish: A Story of Jacques Cousteau* and *Calvin Can't Fly: The Story of a Bookworm Birdie*, as well as two more forthcoming titles: *On a Beam of Light: The Story of Albert Einstein* and *Under a Blanket of Stars*. She grew up in New York City where she was active in dance and theater as a child. She studied art and design and worked for Andy Warhol at "The Factory." After a successful career in advertising, Jennifer began writing for *Nick Jr. Magazine* and writing books about the subjects she loves most—our amazing universe and the people who discover its secrets. She lives in a house she designed in the rolling hills of Columbia County, New York.

**How did your interest in Jacques Cousteau begin? What drew you to him as a subject to research and write about?**

**JB:** I love reading about and writing about the universe, the cosmos, the world, its oceans and the amazing creatures that inhabit our planet. So who better to write about when pondering the oceans, its secrets, and its creatures than Jacques Cousteau?

**What aspects of Jacques Cousteau's personality did you most want to share with your young readers and why?**

**JB:** His passion to know and to discover. And his inventiveness, his creativity, and his love for all things living. Because I think that with those feelings as motivators, we humans can create wonderful, fascinating lives and make Earth a fine and worthwhile home. When I sign copies of *Manfish* I often write, "Always stay curious." That is perhaps at the core of what I want to share.

**How do you think Jacques Cousteau would have responded to last year's Gulf oil spill?**

**JB:** With much sadness. But sadness that leads to action, not inaction. Cousteau said,

"People protect what they love." Clearly we have not yet succeeded in causing people to love our planet enough. We must try harder.

**What should children do who want to be involved in saving the ocean and the species that live within it?**

**JB:** First learn about it. Be curious and ask questions. Develop interests and passions. They will lead you, step by step, into being involved. Hang around museums and aquariums. Ask if you can help. Perhaps write something for your school newsletter about what you've learned, what you care about. Write a letter to the local paper. Raise money by selling lemonade or brownies or drawings and send it to a good organization that helps care for the oceans and its creatures. Be creative; the rest will just fall into place.

**This is your first children's book. What led you from journalistic writing to publishing a picture book biography?**

**JB:** I used to be in advertising, writing TV commercials and print campaigns. Although that was a fun and creative business, I was always writing other people's messages. I wanted to write about what interested me—the

## Meet the Author

universe, our planet, and its wonders. I chose the picture book genre because I love the power, the magic, of combining words with pictures. I had always worked in a medium that combined the two and I did not want to give that up. Also, picture books for children are for an age I love, an age at which their minds are open, curious, and full of questions and wonder. Children are like little scientists, always asking and wanting to discover. And I chose nonfiction because that is one of the places where I find the most exciting stories.

### Do you plan to continue your career as a children's author??

**JB:** I do have another book out now, *Calvin Can't Fly: The Story*

of a Bookworm Birdie, and two more books in the works. The first is a picture book biography of Albert Einstein. *On a Beam of Light: The Story of Albert Einstein* is the true story of a curious little boy who wanted to understand the mysterious magic behind things—the hidden secrets of our world—and who, by wondering, imagining, and figuring, grew up to discover amazing things about our universe that no one had ever known before. My other book-in-the-works is a goodnight book, *Under Blankets Of Stars*, an animal bedtime journey that follows the night around the world and discovers animals sleeping out in the wilds under the stars. It is a lullaby of nature, written in lyrical, rhyming verse.

While I don't plan in the usual sense, I let my interests and my passions lead me. And from where I sit now, I can't imagine doing anything else for a long, long time.

### How can readers learn more about you and your books?

**JB:** Go to my website at [www.jenniferberne.com](http://www.jenniferberne.com).

◆◆◆

**Toni Buzzeo**, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist. She is the author of fourteen picture books, most recently *Lighthouse Christmas* (Dial, 2011) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).

